



Source: AFP, 'Sharon surgery hailed a success', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 07/04/06.

Tags: [streets](#), [art](#), [chance](#), [literature](#), [workplace](#)  
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In the afternoon, I hit the Petersham opportunity shops. Although I've lived in the 'sham for almost two years, I've never visited them. This is clearly an oversight on my part. I used to be addicted to op shops. But accumulating stuff doesn't seem like a great idea anymore. I've got nowhere to put it, and besides, there's the whole guilty sense of responsibility to salvaged junk which 'might possibly have a use' sometime in the future.

However, (and here comes some home-grown philosophy) I do feel strongly that visiting an op shop while in the throes of an art project is a little bit like channelling some divine energy. I think other artists might back me up on this. It's no accident there's 'opportunity' in the name. And it's not just the inert objects sitting on the shelves which create these Cagean, chancy vibrations. It's YOU. You're open to the 'value' of stuff beyond mere utility or style. You let the shop speak to you, inspire you. Anything could happen.

I dunno, maybe this is how regular people feel when they go shopping, and I'm just making a big deal out of it.

Anyway, a charge of electricity ran through my body as I entered the 'community shop' on Crystal Street. A gust of wind banged the glass door closed, whacking me on the butt. I was immediately drawn to the book section. I struck gold. Here's what I found:

1.

Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art*

In the blurb on the back of the book, Ursula writes: 'An essential aspect of Conceptual Art is its self-reference; often the artists define the intentions of their work as part of their art. Thus, many Conceptual Artists advance propositions or investigations.'

2.

Joseph A. Devito, *The Interpersonal Communication Book*

Uh-oh, there's some serious stuff in this textbook which I'm going to have to address ASAP. Take this section called 'outing' on page 79, for example: 'Self-disclosure...is a delicate procedure by which you reveal to other people information about yourself. There is, however, another side to self-disclosure, and that occurs when someone else reveals your hidden self, when someone else takes information from your hidden self and makes it public.'

3.

Moving right along, I also picked up what looked like a shocker of a pop-psych number by Edward de Bono. I couldn't resist—it was called *I am Right—You are Wrong*.

4.

Italo Calvino's *Marcovaldo, or, The Seasons in the City*, a gorgeous set of tales which starts off with an urban mushroom hunt.

5.

*Sleeping Problems (Including Directions for Making an Analysis of Your Sleep and Keeping a Sleep Diary)* by Dr Dietrich Langen.

6.

And, finally, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers* by Samuel

Beckett—two plays about which I know nothing—but at twenty cents for such a specimen of high culture, how could I resist?

As I potted around the shop I couldn't help but overhear a conversation between Pat and Caroline, the op shop ladies. Pat's a volunteer, Caroline obviously holds a role of higher responsibility. Pat was anxious about the upcoming Easter break, and wondering how the roster would be filled, since a lot of the shop staff were going away. Caroline was reassuring her that she'd make up a roster and find a way to keep things running smoothly. My mind stopped in its tracks. I cleared my throat: 'Um, maybe I could help out. I'm just hanging around at the moment, and I've got a bit of spare time...'

Caroline quizzed me: what do I do, am I a student? Et cetera, et cetera. I told her everything about the Petersham residency. She was clearly curious. She's into art, especially collaborative artworks, where many people contribute to a communal output. According to her, these projects can 'bring people out of themselves'. Caroline described a project she'd seen in Manly where an artist had drawn on canvas using silicone. The canvas was then worked over by many people. When it dried, the artist peeled away the silicone, cutting a crisp line through the overpainting and leaving a beautiful interwoven surface—many images layered on the one canvas. She liked this a lot. I explained that it's been some years since I made a painting. I work mainly with text now, but who knows what could happen? Since I have to put together an exhibition towards the end of my residency, maybe some sort of collaborative artwork could be made.

I described my process a bit—you know, allowing the shape of an exhibition to emerge, not laying it out fixed in advance, just trusting that by the end, something will happen. Caroline diagnosed me as a particular personality, based on the Meyer-Briggs scale. I can't remember what type I am, it was represented by two letters of the alphabet. But anyway, apparently I'm that type which functions better with a deadline. 'NO!', I protested, 'I'm trying to get AWAY from that! That's why I've got this strategy of a little bit every day. No more big explosive projects, no more having to mop up the mess afterwards and spend a week in bed sick from fatigue.' Well, she wasn't convinced. Perhaps I'm trying to work against my normal way, but this very fact indicates that escaping the deadline doesn't come naturally.

Caroline said she, too, was interested in keeping a diary. In fact, soon she might start a course in harnessing your inner creativity called 'The Artist's Way'. It involves writing 'morning pages' each day. I've heard a little about this method, although I've never tried it. No doubt it would channel some powerful stuff, especially since, unlike these words, it's all private.

Caroline thought the Crystal Street Community Shop would be a good place for me to hang out and meet folks. She suggested I pop back in again soon and spend a little more time, to see if it was the right place for me.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucas Ihlein.*